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ABSTRACT

U.S. business and government are managing an increasingly heterogeneous work force. Between 1985 and 2000, white females, nonwhites, and immigrants are projected to represent 88 percent of new workers. Approximately 4 million new immigrant workers will join the work force during the next 10 years. Therefore, it is imperative that employers recognize and accommodate this diversity of talents and cultures. The old assimilation model no longer is desirable because it fosters disrespect for some cultures and increases tensions. In order to deal with diversity, employers must first define it. They must pay attention to multiple diversities of gender, race, ethnic origin, and cultural background. Employers should help new employees to acclimate themselves to the workplace by providing training in basic skills as well as in workplace expectations. At the same time, they should help dominant-culture employees respect and accept the new workers. Communications, in face-to-face exchanges as well as through company newsletters and training sessions, should be welcoming and should accentuate the positive effects of employing workers with varying talents and accomplishments. By reducing the kinds of stress that cause uncertainty and anxiety in workers from other cultures, and hence adversely affect productivity. Companies will be helped to better compete in the increasingly diverse marketplace of the next century. (Contains 10 references.) (KC)

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DEVELOPING DIVERSITY INITIATIVES: DEFINITIONS AND PROCESS

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Introduction

American companies, governmental agencies and other entities are managing an increasingly heterogeneous workforce. White females, nonwhites and immigrants are projected to represent 88% of new workers between 1985 and 2000. Immigrants will comprise 22% of this increase. Blacks, Hispanics and other minorities share of the workforce will increase from 18% to 29% during this period (Johnston and Packer, 1987). The new workers will bring different perspectives, values, languages, work ethic, educational levels and personal goals.

There will be approximately 4 million new immigrant workers over the next ten years. They represent a large, vital, untapped human resource pool. It is imperative that America capitalize on this source of talent, resourcefulness, and diversity to enhance its competitive position in the global market. Employers must plan to capitalize on this pool by facilitating the development of personal communication and social communication skills, and creating a corporate culture that is inclusive. New immigrant status should be recognized as a dimension of workforce diversity because the process of adaptation to a new cultural and work environment has unique and identifiable qualities that impact productivity and interpersonal relations in the workplace.

Employers are aware of the changing demographics of the workforce (Mathes, 1991). However, few are treating it as a business issue. A limited number are developing training and other initiatives to prepare managers and employees to manage and relate to employees who are different from themselves. These efforts aim to reduce conflicts; accommodate varying ethics, values and customs; sensitize to cultural differences; and develop management skills. These initiatives are weak and will not lead to executive commitment for the initiatives or long-term changes in attitudes and behaviors of employees.

Diversity initiatives lack a foundation on empirical studies or powerful theory. They are further weakened by an inconsistent use of terms and concepts. Employers need direction and focus which can be provided by research and use of descriptive vocabulary. A focus on the relationship between business needs and

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workforce diversity will allow business to see the changing demographics in terms of productivity, creativity, quality, service and profits. Current terminology and initiatives are viewed as extensions of affirmative action and corporate social responsibility. Business leaders need evidence to support and commit to diversity initiatives that go beyond social-legal concerns and contribute to achieving corporate goals.

Employers are engaged in different types of activities to determine what diversity is and how it impacts their organizations. Committees, focus groups and audits of organization culture are representative of these efforts. The results sometimes include formulation of definitions of diversity and recommendations for company initiatives. This first step can be strengthened by evaluating empirical studies and theories related to characteristics of diversity affecting employee morale, productivity and creativity.

This article will review terms and concepts related to diversity in the workplace, outline a planning process for diversity initiatives, and illustrate the process using a theory to describe the cross-cultural adaptation of immigrants.

Vocabulary and concepts

The literature reveals a variety of terms and concepts addressing the changing demographics of the workplace. Assimilation, pluralism, multiculturalism, valuing diversity, managing diversity, cross-cultural and diversity are among the most popular. Their meanings vary among writers, trainers, organizations and employees. There is a need to develop definitions and concepts to facilitate communication, review pertinent theory and research, and enlist support of senior executives. The variety of definitions and concepts utilized to refer to diversity limits effective communication between employers, human resource and organizational development specialists, and trainers. Clarity of vocabulary and concepts are prerequisites to the development of diversity initiatives.

The term diversity, although popular, tells very little about the forms of differences. Employers are developing definitions unique to their organizations. This practice does not facilitate communication between organizations or individuals developing or delivering training to address the issues of diversity in the workplace. These definitions are often inclusive, narrow, and focused. Inclusive definitions usually result from committees that address a range of employee/employer concerns. The Internal Revenue Service has developed the following inclusive definition.

"Building an organizational culture that accommodates diversity means more than balancing the racial and gender mix of the workforce. It means using the talents of older members of the workforce whose experience we will

lvalue more as the labor pool for their replacements get smaller. It means dealing with the educational deficiencies of many new recruits, especially in the larger metropolitan areas, where decline in the skill levels of high school graduates has been well documented. It means trying to create a work environment and employee progression plans which accommodate dual career families and families with children. Dealing with the need that all employees have to balance family and work responsibilities regardless of their race or gender can be as much a part of managing diversity as learning to appreciate the values held by various ethnic groups."

(Internal Revenue Service, 1989, p. 3)

Many employers in government, hospitals, hotels, nursing homes, business and industry use a narrow definition of diversity. Diversity for them relates exclusively to issues of race and gender. This view is sometimes reflective of current legal problems or employee complaints of sexual discrimination and harassment. Thomas (1991) and Geber (1990) provide a more focused definition. They are concerned with managing diversity. Thomas defines managing diversity as a process of evaluating, modifying or changing the corporate culture to enable managers to tap the full potential of all employees. Geber, uses the phrase to refer to changes in the behavior of managers. Both writers agree "valuing diversity" addresses affects and attitudes.

Sometimes "diversity," "pluralism" and "multicultural" are used in a single sentence, paragraph or document. The U. S. Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension System (1990) Pathway to Diversity initiative is a strategic plan to provide a vision of the agency as a "diverse multicultural organization that values, is committed to, and embodies pluralism as a long-term investment in the future," and "a role model for achieving a pluralistic society (Cooperative Extension Service, 1992, p.1). The document defines the terms as follows:

"Diversity is defined as differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and other human differences."

"Pluralism is defined as an organizational culture that incorporates mutual respect, acceptance, teamwork, and productivity among people who are diverse in the dimensions of human differences listed above as diversity."

"Multicultural organizations are defined as organizations that: value human differences as a competitive advantage; have a pluralistic culture that reflects the interests, contributions, and values of members of diverse groups; have full and influential participation by all members of the organization in decisions and policies that shape the organization, and eliminate discrimination throughout the organization."

The practice of developing new definitions of "diversity" should be replaced by the use of descriptive terms to refer to specific dimensions of differences. For example, ethnic diversity, gender diversity, race diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, sexual orientation diversity, religious diversity, and new immigrant. These categories can serve as guides for issues and concerns during needs assessment and review of related literature. Specific communication, management, and interpersonal relations issues may be identified under each category.

The term diversity is used to imply the opposite of assimilation of homogenization. Many writers acknowledge the role

of the philosophy of assimilation in the development of America. The evaluation of this philosophy and the proposal of new perspectives is due to the growing competition in the global market, the change in workplace demographics, and the demand of individuals to celebrate their uniqueness (Thomas). Loden and Rosener (1991) contend that while assimilation has served us well in the past, it is now undesirable because it does not value each member of the current workforce. It does not acknowledge the heterogeneity of the workforce as a vital resource. The negative effects of assimilation such as pressures to conform, role confusion, exclusion and isolation, and on-going tension limit the potential of diverse employees and the success of the organizations.

Arthur Schlesinger is a firm believer in the value of the philosophy of assimilation for America (1992). He is concerned that the interest in creating a multicultural society will distract us from working towards common goals and ideals. He views the challenge as how "to vindicate cherished cultures and traditions without breaking the bonds of cohesion..." (139). Kim (1988) regards the issue of assimilation versus cultural pluralism to be "an issue of value and choice only between those who believe in preserving ethnicity and those who believe in assimilation as a desirable and personal goal" (p. 164). Immigrants, she asserts, do not have a choice because cultural pluralism and diversity are always present during the process of adaptation to a new cultural milieu.

Planning Diversity Initiatives

Strengthening the process of developing diversity initiatives should include an audit of values, perspectives, issues and concerns that inhibit employees from realizing their full potential in the workplace. The audit should focus on identifying the spectrum of human diversity, defined as the "vast array of physical and cultural differences" (Loden & Rosener, 1991) that affect communication, morale and productivity of the workforce. These differences consist of things that we are born with and cannot change and those that we modify during our lifetime. Age, ethnicity, culture, gender, and sexual orientation would be among the former and educational background, marital status, religious beliefs, and geographic location, among the latter.

Identification of the dimensions of diversity that affect the organization climate should lead employers to research and evaluated related literature. Empirical studies and theories related to identified dimensions and issues of diversity can advance current training initiatives from current confusion, poor focus and dismal results to one of improved customer service, more effective intercultural communication and improved teamwork and morale. Implications of the studies can assist employers to design initiatives in terms of specific issues that affect them.

CULTURE AUDIT
(identifies characteristics of diversity
i.e. adaptation of immigrants)

THEORY/EMPIRICAL STUDIES
(related to identified characteristics of diversity
i.e. Kim theory of adaptation of immigrants)

IMPLICATIONS OF STUDIES/THEORY
(i.e. Kim)

Developing Communication Skills	Participation in Ethnic Communications	Receptivity of Environment	Pressure to Conform

DIVERSITY INITIATIVES

Training:		Training:	Executive evaluation of company philosophy
-English as a second language	-Coaching -Mentoring	-Culture awareness -Prejudice/ stereptyping	-Assimilation -Pluralism
-Company rules & protocol	-Work schedules	-Ethnocentrism	
-Telephone manners	-Work stations		
-Company ethics & protocol		Use of internal media -Office aesthetics	
-Participation in teams/meetings		-Posters -Bulletin boards -Newsletters	
		Social interaction -Happy hour -Coffee breaks -Meetings -Picnics	

Communication and Cross-cultural Adaptation Theory

The communication and cross-cultural adaptation theory developed by Kim provides an understanding of and makes specific predictions on how individuals adapt to a new culture through continuous communication with the host environment. This theory can provide a foundation for the development of diversity programs addressing the adaptation of immigrants to the workplace. Flirth (1988) considered it "powerful enough to reveal for the first time many threads of mutually supportive truth running through much of the evidence" (Flirth, 1988, p. 37). It integrates theories ranging from the positivist to the ethnographic and considers research in cross-cultural adaptation, anthropology, intercultural communication, psychology, psychiatry, and sociology, among other disciplines. "The net result is an interlocking network of descriptive, explanatory and predictive theorems" (Flirth, 1988, p. 38).

The theory is developed along six interrelated dimensions: personal communication, host social communication, ethnic social communication, host environment, adaptive predisposition, and adaptation outcome. The theorems selected for discussion have implications for diversity initiatives addressing the needs of new immigrants to the workplace.

Cross-cultural adaptation is influenced by personal, social and environment factors. Personal characteristics of the immigrant include age, race/cultural background, openness, resilience, formal schooling, and preparation for migration. The willingness, openness, and conformity pressure are environment factors in this stress-adaptation-growth process. The social communication networks of fellow immigrants, natives and personal community provide the human connection to the host culture. This connection is extended to the society at-large by the mass media.

Personal and Social communication

The first theorem stresses the need for immigrants to develop communication skills with the new culture. Increased communication skills will contribute to greater participation in interpersonal communication with natives, and more independent behavior in society and on the job. The immigrant must develop the capability to identify and interpret messages in a meaningful manner. In order to do this, he must learn the language, nonverbal behaviors and organization rules of the new culture.

The development of communication competence will allow the worker to become independent in a variety of work situations. It will contribute to the reduction of occupational and interpersonal errors while increasing the "fit" between the worker and the

workplace. Employers should sponsor, encourage and support training to improve the communication competence of immigrant workers. This training, most often English as a second language, can be part of company training. Employers should also support adult education programs sponsored by public schools, community colleges and community-based organizations. Language acquisition training must be supplemented with employer training on written and unwritten rules and protocol, telephone manners, business etiquette and ethics, and procedures for conducting and participating in meetings.

The participation of immigrants in ethnic communication processes can help and hinder adaptation. It is particularly helpful during the initial days of immigration when assistance is needed to locate housing, jobs and establish a network of friends. Many ethnic communities organize support for these efforts. The larger communities also provide ethnic newspapers, radio and television stations. The provision of these services by ethnic support organizations contribute to maintaining linkages to original cultural communication patterns. Increasing host interpersonal communication competency however, depends on continuous communication with the host culture. Consequently, immigrants must increase communication with the native community and decrease that with the ethnic community. "The choice remains ultimately one that individual strangers must make taking into consideration the challenges and demands of the host society itself and the nature of their roles and aspirations in that society" (Kim, 1988, p. 127).

Employers can facilitate adaptation to the workplace by providing a "coach" during the initial period of employment. The coach should be an immigrant who has successfully met many of the challenges of adaptation and who is cognizant of the rules and protocol of the workplace. Independence in the workplace requires that the immigrant be weaned from the coach. The employer can develop work schedules and work station assignments that promote contact and teambuilding with natives and others who have been assimilated in the workforce.

Host environment

The receptivity of the host environment affects the development of host communication competence, and participation in host interpersonal communication. An environment that is open and welcoming will accelerate the development of communication skills. A hostile and closed environment is often expressed through non-verbal behaviors. It is discouraging and makes the immigrant feel insecure. The reaction of the immigrant is to withdraw from the negative atmosphere. This withdrawal reduces the opportunities to develop host communication competence.

Employers can create a receptive workplace through the attitudes and actions of workers, aesthetic atmosphere of the workplace, and internal communication media. All employees should be provided training to develop awareness and management skills for personal prejudices, stereotyping, and ethnocentrism. It is important to include immigrants in the meetings, coffee breaks, happy hours and other social gatherings of employees.

An aesthetic environment that includes a variety of expressive impulses can create the feeling of openness and welcome. Employers' displays of art, posters, and bulletin boards that include a broad range of aesthetic expressions that mirror the values of society and the workforce. These displays could also include artistic expressions from other cultures and lands.

The internal communication media provide opportunities to express support and respect for immigrants. The organization can facilitate the adaptation to the workplace by recognizing accomplishments of new immigrants in the internal media. These efforts contribute to improved recruiting and retention, increased productivity and fewer interpersonal conflicts and misunderstandings.

The pressure to conform to the host environment affects the development of host communication competence and participation in host interpersonal communication. "Societies that are relatively free, pluralistic and heterogeneous tend to manifest a substantially high level of tolerance level toward cultural diversity" (Kim, 1988, p. 130). The opposite is true for relatively controlled, totalitarian and homogeneous environments. These tend to exert greater pressure to follow accepted beliefs, values, language and behavioral norms. Consequently, host communication competence and interpersonal communication competence is more easily achieved under the latter. The pressure to conform creates stress. The impact of stress decreases as there is an increase in host communication competence and personal management of social communication activities.

Organizations that operate under a philosophy of assimilation must be aware that this view causes cross-cultural stress. The amount of stress varies with each individual and ranges from conformity to employee attrition. This stress causes uncertainty and anxiety that affect productivity. Employers must evaluate the corporate culture to determine if changes are required to reduce stress and accommodate differences.

Employers initiatives to address the increasing heterogeneity of the workforce should be based on empirical studies or powerful theory. Employers and practitioners should strive to be consistent in use of concepts and terms. Cross-cultural communication theorists are a rich resource to guide employers addressing these

shortcomings of diversity initiatives and for addressing the needs of new immigrant adaptation to the workplace. The outline for planning diversity initiatives can be utilized for other characteristics of diversity such as gender, age, and culture.

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